

# FIRE DESTROYS COLUMBIAN EXPO EXHIBIT

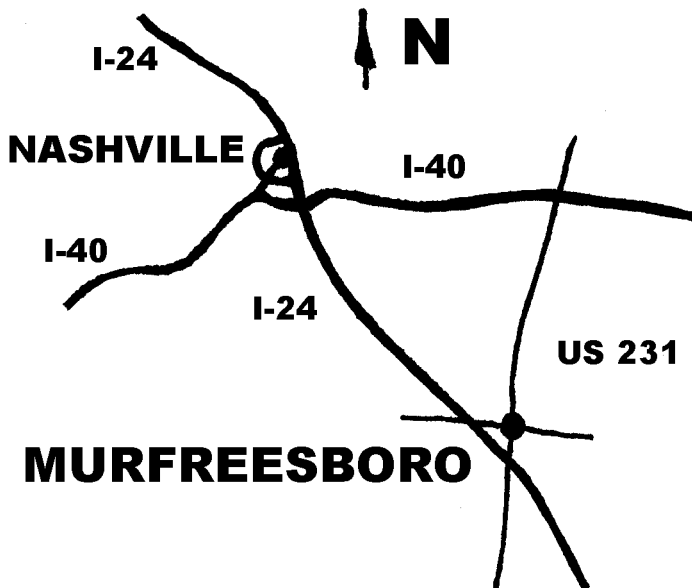
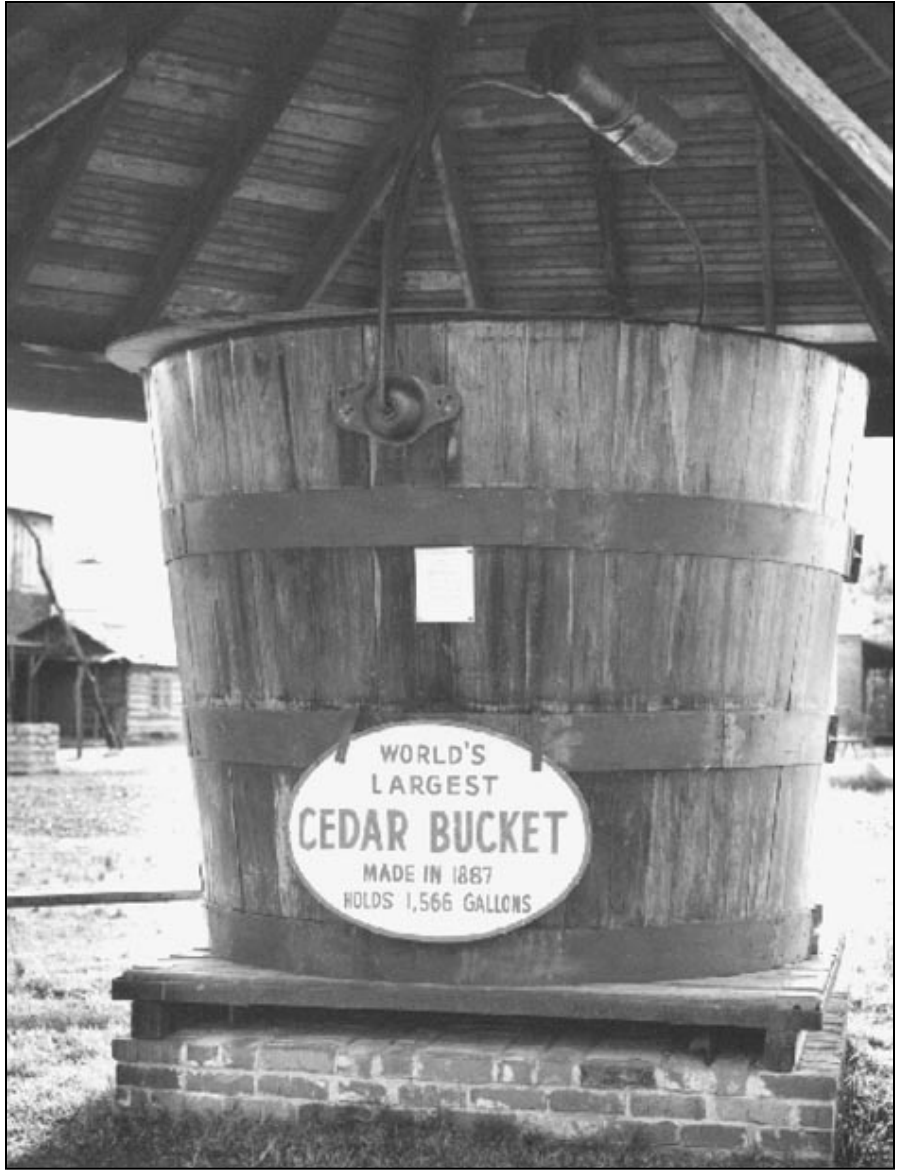
By G. L. Dybwad and Joy V. Bliss, Members #1926

Upon hearing “World’s largest bucket shown at the Columbian Exposition...” while surfing channels on our high definition television, we stopped right there at the Discovery HD channel! The series is “Road Trip,” and two young announcers in a new Ford Mustang convertible wander the byways of America searching for unique historic and geographic sights. In this segment, the trip took them through the hills of Tennessee on their way to explore Nashville.

The arresting words were spoken during a stop on US highway 231 in Murfreesboro. There, the camera panned around to a large wooden bucket housed under a protective gazebo. Soon the duo continued their trip up to Nashville, but we wanted to learn more about the bucket.

Checking a map and the phone area code, we called and learned that the TV cast and crew had stopped in the local Pioneer Village city park in the suburb of Cannonsburgh. Teresa Own and Fred Trujillo, park program coordinators, were glad to relate the story of the bucket and send printed matter about the bucket’s history and the pictures provided here.

The bucket, made from native red cedar and measuring six feet in diameter



at the base, nine feet wide at the top and six feet high, was built in 1887 by the W.L. Patterson family as a promotion for their Tennessee Red Cedar Woodenworks Company. Since 1866, the Murfreesboro area had been a major supplier of cedar and its products such as buckets, churns, tubs, cedar oil, and slats used for making “lead” pencils. The 800 pound mammoth bucket held 1,566 gallons and had stood the test of time. After the Columbian Exposition exhibit in Chicago in 1893, the bucket saw duty as a popular beer container at the 1904 Saint Louis World’s Fair. The Patterson factory burned in 1950 and the bucket was sold to the White family, who ran a model train ride at the Winnepesaukah Amusement Park near Rossville, Georgia.

When Murfreesboro developed their Pioneer Vil-

lage in response to the 1976 Centennial, the Whites graciously donated the big bucket back to the city. A local Boy Scout troop spent two days scrapping and refinishing the well-traveled bucket. As originally intended, the bucket still brought giggles and gawks from curious visitors.

The life of the big bucket in Chicago in 1893 is uncertain judging from official records. First, the state of Tennessee failed to appropriate funds for a State Building, although it did have a National Board of Lady Managers and National Commission representatives; hence, the bucket couldn't have been there. The best collective exhibit from Tennessee was in the Mines and Mining Building.

A review of our chief sources listing exhibitors, *The Official Directory* and *Official Catalogue of Exhibits : World's Columbian Exposition*, revealed no direct listing for the bucket, but its location would most probably have been in the Forestry Building with the other exhibitors of similar wooden buckets and lumber products. That classification is "Group 19, Class 110: Paper and wooden ware generally, as pails, tubs, platters, brooms, coopers' stock." One possibility is that the Tennessee Red Cedar Woodenworks Company combined its exhibit with the Todd & Roper Company, Milan, Tennessee, making a collective cooperage display; Todd & Roper is the only Tennessee wood company listed as an exhibitor in Class 110: #19a, and its location number in the building was C-13. Our edition of the *Official Catalogue* doesn't even list an exhibitor #19; we wonder if perhaps the Tennessee Red Cedar Woodenworks either withdrew early or did not send in its exhibit information on time for publication. Another possibility is that Tennessee Red Cedar joined forces with the Southern Lumber Manufacturer's Association based in St. Louis, which was exhibitor #18a in the Forestry Building; however, Southern Lumber generally displayed decorative woods used in home woodwork finishing.

The major histories of the fair, Bancroft's *The Book of the Fair* and Rossiter Johnson's *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition* do not mention the bucket, perhaps because it was eclipsed by the impressive red cedar displays from the new forests of the Pacific slopes of California and Washington State and the giant stack of cedar buckets from the Richmond Cedar Works, Richmond, Virginia.

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The Big Cedar Bucket on Parade

References to the bucket's life at the St. Louis fair are equally elusive. Arnie Johns, current Rutherford County Historian, has a recent book about the area and bucket, but it has no reference to the name of the brewery or its location. Also, Mike Truax, President of the 1904 World's Fair Society and Jean Gosebrink, Special Collections, St. Louis Public Library, could not find a reference to the bucket's actual location in St. Louis.

Alas, you can no longer stop in and see the bucket! Last summer, vandals torched and nearly destroyed it. Local citizens are planning and working to rebuild and repair the remains of the bucket, so that in the future it can be put back on display in Murfreesboro.

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